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Lincoln





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"I believe the hand of God placed him where he is."

—JOHN HAY, 1863.

LINCOLN



By Geo. D. Perkins

CENTENNIAL ANNIVERSARY

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John Hay was Lincoln's junior private secretary. His senior was John G. Nicolay. They were the literary executors of the war president.

A delightful personal letter from Hay to Nicolay, written in the sweltering August of 1863, has been added to the literature of this anniversary year.

Hay wrote:

"Everybody has gone. The tycoon is in fine whack. I have rarely seen him more serene and busy. He is managing this war, the draft, foreign relations, and planning a reconstruction of the union, all at once. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the cabinet, till now. The most important things he decides and there is no cavil." There is a glimpse of Lincoln's energy, power and faith. In the midst of everything, and in the days of 1863, when everything was dark, he was "planning a reconstruction of the union."

I think this faith had to do with what follows in the Hay letter, which I beg you to note:

"There is no man in the country so wise, so gentle and so firm. I believe the hand of God placed him where he is."

Hay was then 25, and such was the impression made on the mind of the young man in his intimate association.

As to some things set forth by Hay in this personal letter we are now, on this centenary anniversary, agreed; but as to the belief of the young man, in the possession of which he died, beloved and full of honor, I imagine there is more obscurity of thinking.

We are disposed to say in the company of superficiality that the age of miracles is past, but to give the

mind to that conclusion is to drift rudderless on a tempestuous and shoreless sea.

The touching words of Lincoln in his farewell to his friends at Springfield, as he was setting forth in February, 1861, to steal his way to Washington to assume the great office to which he had been chosen, lifted a sacred veil from his soul. He said:

“To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that divine being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in him, who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To his care commanding you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.”

We need not deem it strange that at the time it was asked if any good thing could come out of Hardin county, in the wilds of Kentucky. Lincoln came into prominence and to the presidency in rebuke of tradition. He took into national leadership the figure of the backwoodsman. He was lean and lank, six feet four, with a hand that gave no sign of the delicacy of his heart. My belief is that he was one of the “called according to his purpose.”

At least, the story has kinship of interest with the best put down in holy writ.

It was given to this new world to wrestle with the great problem of human bondage. The trial was not

for America alone; it was for every land under the sun. Therefore it was for us to drink the cup to its dregs. The colonists accepted the institution from the mother country. At the conclusion of the war of independence it was thought the divine spirit of the declaration under which the war was precipitated would soon clear the flag of the young republic.

The uppermost thought in the constitutional convention of 1787 was "to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." Not many were interested in slavery, but the exigencies of the time required recognition of its existence. Georgia and South Carolina insisted on that condition. So it was written: "No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due."

But in the first congress we had the ordinance of 1787, forming the northwest territory, out of which we have Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota, in which slavery was forever prohibited. That was the beginning of the coil which tightened as the years went by and finally strangled the institution in the bloody struggle of the great war of '61 to '65. The bitter cup was drained to the last drop. Every slave was made free, and the liberty light of the United States shone round the world. A wonderful history was written in the century lying between.

With the invention of the cotton gin and the conse-

quent development of the cotton industry, slavery was fused with the life of the southern states.

The Louisiana purchase in 1803 was not a disturbing event. That gave us control of the mouth of the Mississippi river, and little reckoning was made over the vast territory to the northward, out of which the great states of the Missouri basin have been created. The south was in the saddle. It was before the days of railroads and telegraphs, advance agents of tidal waves of emigration. The secrets of the future were well guarded. There was no dream of conflict between the inland and the sea.

The Missouri compromise of 1820 seemed at the time in the interest of the slave power. Missouri was added to the slave states. But it was conceded that all Louisiana territory, except Missouri, north of $36^{\circ} 30'$, north lat., should be forever barred to slavery. Could Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, the land of the Dakotas, and the rest ever be anything but a waste for Indians and wild animals? Missouri was gained, and nothing lost.

The railroads were pioneers in unfolding the plan hidden from the view of men. As railroads advanced to conquer the empire of the west, mighty states followed in their course.

For well nigh thirty years the tide of anti-slavery sentiment rose steadily. It spread consternation in 1856; it brought to view its white crest to the farthest south state in 1860, and later, under the great leadership of Abraham Lincoln, it established, under challenge, upon every slave battlement the flag of the free.

The Mexican war, in its time, was signal that the south had awakened to the fact that the equilibrium by which it held the north in check was being destroyed. The republic of Texas was annexed in 1845. The plan was to convert it into five slaveholding states. The war with

Mexico was provoked to acquire additional territory for slavery. Under the terms of peace a large territory was ceded to the United States, where now we have, in whole or part, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado and Wyoming; and that was in 1848, sixty-one years ago this month.

Was the discovery of gold in California a miracle? Surely, at least, it was in the plan.

The ink was scarcely dry on the treaty with Mexico when the news of the discovery began to spread. The gold fever took wide range. The inoculation extended to people over the sea. The movement to California was unprecedented in the history of migration; and the exodus was not appreciably of slave owners. The population of California jumped from a few thousand to near 100,000; and then California stood at the door of the union, knocking, with a constitution that barred slavery.

One of the pathetic figures of the time was John C. Calhoun, the mighty senator from South Carolina, with the hand of death upon him. The compromise resolutions of 1850 had been introduced by Clay. He had the support of Webster; he had the opposition of Calhoun. There was hardly anything more to be said than these men said. The great speech of Calhoun was read for him by a brother senator. He dragged himself to the senate to hear and to take such part as he could. Death took him on the last day of March. Calhoun foretold that the union would be severed unless the equilibrium between the south and north were maintained; and he insisted upon the impossible condition that agitation to the prejudice of slavery cease. He stoutly maintained the doctrine that the constitution carried slavery into all the territories of the United States. The north was

challenged to surrender or suffer the inevitable consequence of disunion. Zachary Taylor, the southerner, died, and was succeeded by Millard Fillmore, the northerner. California was admitted as a free state.

The Mexican war was a failure—colossal on the southern side.

The great question of the equilibrium remained; the agitation went on with increasing volume, and another struggle was quickly provided.

In 1854, under the lead of Stephen A. Douglas, ambitions for the presidency, the Missouri compromise was set aside by the Kansas-Nebraska bill, reported by him, affirming the doctrine, as it came to be known, of “squatter sovereignty.”

Lincoln had served one term in congress—1847-1849. He believed he was out of polities, but events wheeled him into line. He quickly took his place as the leader of the anti-slavery sentiment of Illinois. His supporters wanted to send him to the senate in 1855 as the successor of Gen. Shields, but there were a few anti-whig votes he could not control, and Lyman Trumbull was made senator. In 1856 his friends wanted him on the republican ticket with Fremont, but the vice presidential nomination went to Dayton. In 1858 he was nominated in state convention for the Douglas succession in the senate, and the memorable debate between Lincoln and Douglas followed. Lincoln carried a majority of the popular vote, but the districts were so formed that he lost out in the legislature; and thus was Lincoln preserved for the presidency.

Between 1845 and 1860 anti-slavery sentiment grew by leaps and bounds. Emigrants from the old world, flocking to our shores, chose the free states for settlement. The south was losing in the congress and the

north was gaining. The handwriting on the wall became more and more conspicuous.

At the inception of the great struggle the situation was better understood in the south than it was in the north. It was seen there that the time for compromise was past, and that the time for decisive and final action had come. The expectation was that the north would let it go; that if resistance were offered the friends of the south in the north would supply efficient aid to bring resistance to a speedy close. The warning of Calhoun was not sufficiently heeded on this side. The talk of dissolution of the union, that human bondage might be perpetuated, was put down to the bluster and the vapor of southern oratory.

The south knew the coil was tightening. Buchanan's election involved postponement, and nothing more. The election of Lincoln was the signal to arms. There was no more time to dawdle. The waiting game was seen to be a losing one. Repulses in congress were inflammatory to the mind. Every year the balance of power was becoming more one-sided. It was then or never; then, more than ever in the future it could hope to be, the south was prepared. In all available ways provision had been made. The south was impelled by the power of its own logic to force the issue. The south was united; the north, because of its freedom, divided.

Small chance had been given the north to make provision for civil war. The cry of "The union forever!" rose above the murmuring of the northern support the south anticipated. Foreign intervention—so hoped for there, so dreaded here—did not come.

Leadership? It was thought to be all with the south. But Abraham Lincoln had been providentially supplied; and there was tramp of many feet, and the answer above

the drum beats, “We are coming, Father Abraham, 300,000 more!”

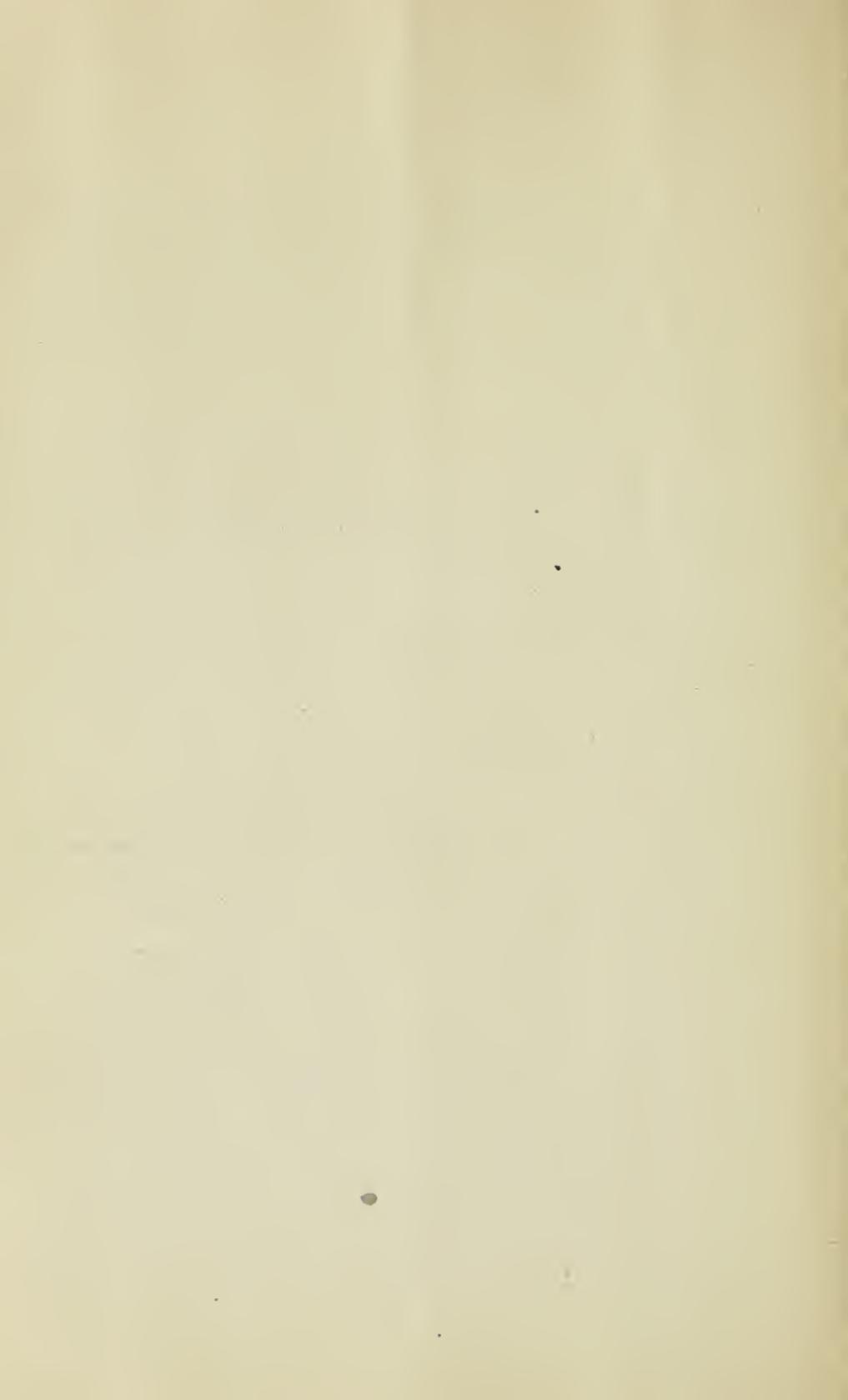
But let us go back a moment to 1858.

As to the manner of man Lincoln was disclosed in the lines, portentous to him and the cause of human liberty, with which he opened his speech in response to the action of the state convention in naming him as senatorial candidate against the “Little Giant.” The words made echo around the world. He said:

“A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it to cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the states, old as well as new—north as well as south.”

That was Lincoln’s keynote. It was a bold utterance for the time. William H. Seward, less direct of speech, declared the conflict irrepressible. All free or all slave! That was the issue confronting the south. Secession was precipitated as the only recourse, and with the south hedged in and the north expanding delay would be fatal. Calhoun had sounded the note on the southern side.

There had been a wonderful succession of events in the preceding half score of years. It was a mighty procession: The Mexican war; the Wilmot proviso; the stream of free men, by sea and desolate land, to California; the inflammable colors of the south met everywhere; the slave hunters on many trails; the heart-thrilling book of Harriet Beecher Stowe; the far cries



of the Phillipses and the Garrisons; the broken faith in the repeal of the Missouri compromise; the Dred Scott decision; the Kansas civil war, with immigrants from liberty states on one side and "border ruffians" on the other; the heroic figure of "Ossawatomie" Brown—John Brown, whose "soul goes marching on." There has been nothing like it in the history of time.

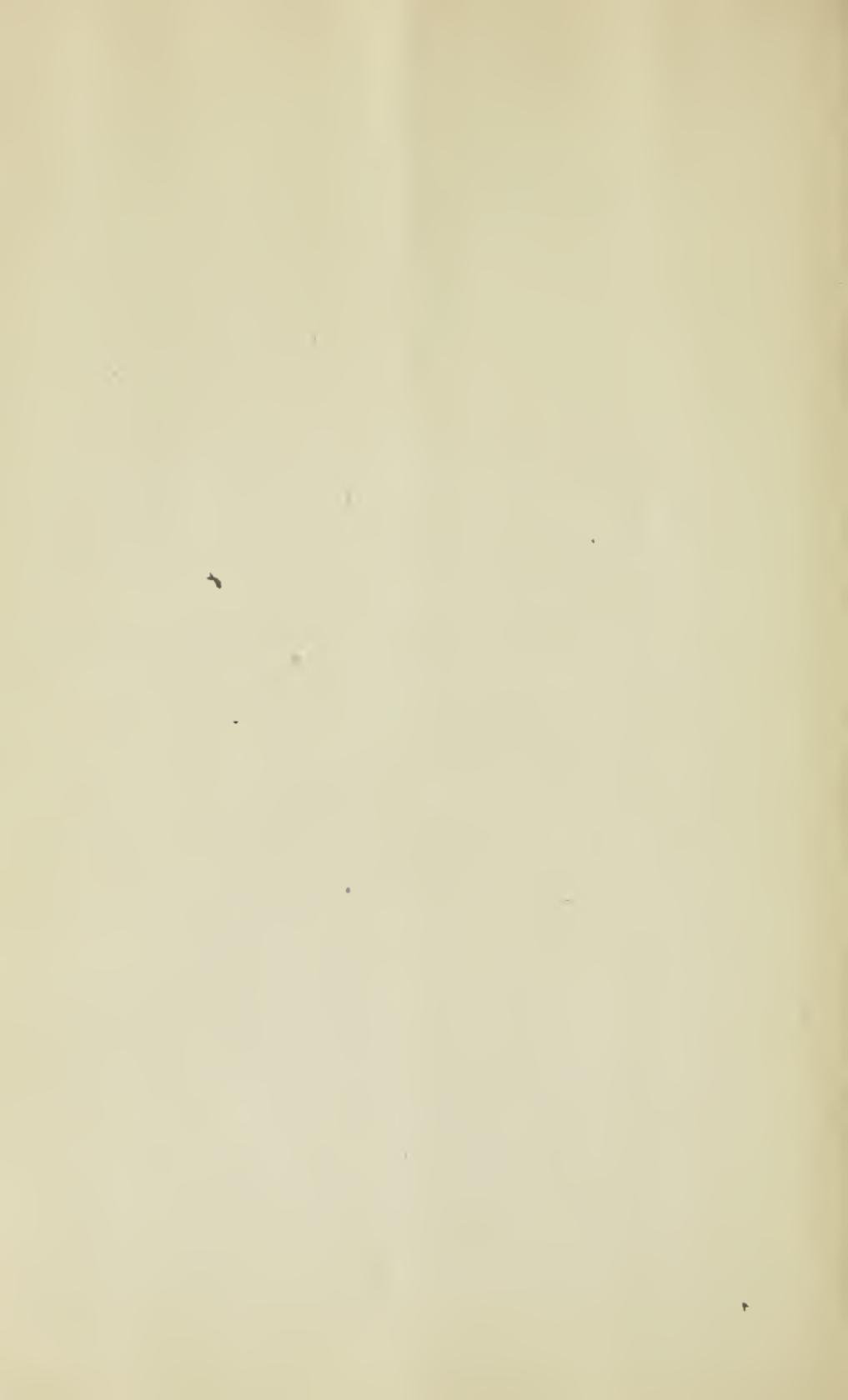
Abraham Lincoln, his own schoolmaster, the country lawyer, product of the lowly, with acquaintance only just begun in states beyond his own, was nominated for president by a party of new birth—in Chicago, May 18, 1860. Surprise was general. The result was unlooked for in Iowa. The impression was that William H. Seward would be the man—the cultivated New Yorker, leader in the senate of anti-slavery sentiment.

Was the nomination of Lincoln a miracle? And was his election, with the opposition divided as a Red sea, the consummation of it?

The work of Lincoln was to preserve the union, and upon that he bent all the noble resources of his mind. All other issues were submerged by the one. His first inaugural address was a pathetic appeal to his countrymen. He closed with words that cannot die:

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of the civil war. The government will not assail you. You have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend it.'

"I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every



battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

Sublime prophecy! Complete fulfillment is jeweled in the heritage of our time.

There was much assumption that the administration would proceed roughly to destroy slavery. There was confusion of tongues. But Lincoln did not mean to interfere with slavery in the states where it lawfully existed; he meant to protect the territories and restrict its spread. He may have thought there would be no war under clear understanding of his purpose; but the fact of his presidency and the increasing power of his party satisfied the south that the time had come for the abandonment of hope that slavery could live in a government controlled by its enemies.

The answer came in the belching guns of Beauregard on defenseless Sumter. The issue was joined to be settled through the arbitrament of savage war at cruel cost.

Lincoln, in inexpressible sorrow of heart, was driven in upon his faith. The world has never witnessed a higher example of moral courage. The trouble most perplexing and grievous to be borne came from friends. He suffered mistrust, he became the object of contumely—and he went often apart to pray! In strong quarters pet policies were put before the great cause of saving the union, and against these currents Lincoln stood, the giant that he was.

In August, 1862, Lincoln replied to Horace Greeley in these words:

"My paramount object is to save the union, and not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the

union without freeing any slave, I would do it; if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and, if I could do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that."

Mr. Greeley, great as he was and beyond all question patriotic as he was, did not understand Lincoln or discern the wisdom of his way; and it is not surprising that smaller minds, opinionated and zealous, joined in angry disputation.

It was well that Lincoln was patient, open-minded, forbearing, longsuffering, resourceful, selfreliant, of abiding faith and overflowing with good works. He was a man of many sorrows; he went often into the valley of the shadow of death, but he came forth again, renewed in strength, in the company of the Shepherd of his faith.

The last time Gen. John M. Palmer saw Lincoln alive was in 1865, at the dawn of peace. Lincoln was in the hands of the barber, but he said to Palmer to come right in; "you are home folks and it doesn't matter with home folks." During a pause in the conversation Palmer said he was thinking of the great war and its enormous responsibilities.

"Mr. Lincoln," said Palmer good humoredly, "if I had known there was to be so great a rebellion I should never have thought of going to a one-horse town for a one-horse lawyer for president."

Lincoln stretched forth his arms, pushed the barber aside, and abruptly wheeled about to face his visitor. Palmer thought he was angry because of what he had said. But Lincoln replied:

"Nor I either. It's lucky for this country no man was chosen who had a great policy and would have stuck to it. If such a man had been chosen this rebellion would never have reached a successful conclusion. I

have had no great policy; but I have tried to do my duty every day, hoping that the morrow would find that I had "done right."

Lincoln possessed the highest order of judicial temperament. He could be fair with foe as well as friend; he had humility and was merciful.

I cannot forbear quoting the concluding words of his second inaugural address, for they reveal the grandeur of his soul, the containment of his mind, the key to all his greatness.

Listen:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

That was on the 4th of March, 1865. At Appomattox, April 9, following, the greatest of soldiers, Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, received the surrender of Gen. Robert E. Lee, the greatest of the soldiers of the confederacy—and the war was over.

In his way—shall we say in the Lord's way?—by proclamation and by constitutional enactment, the stain of slavery was blotted from the map of the United States; and to the glory of the flag it can never come back—for such is the will of a common people, whether of those who bought and sold, or of those who died to make men free.

"The union forever!"

In the midst of national rejoicing, on the 14th of April, the great president was assassinated. It was to avenge the south; but the vengeance was upon the south

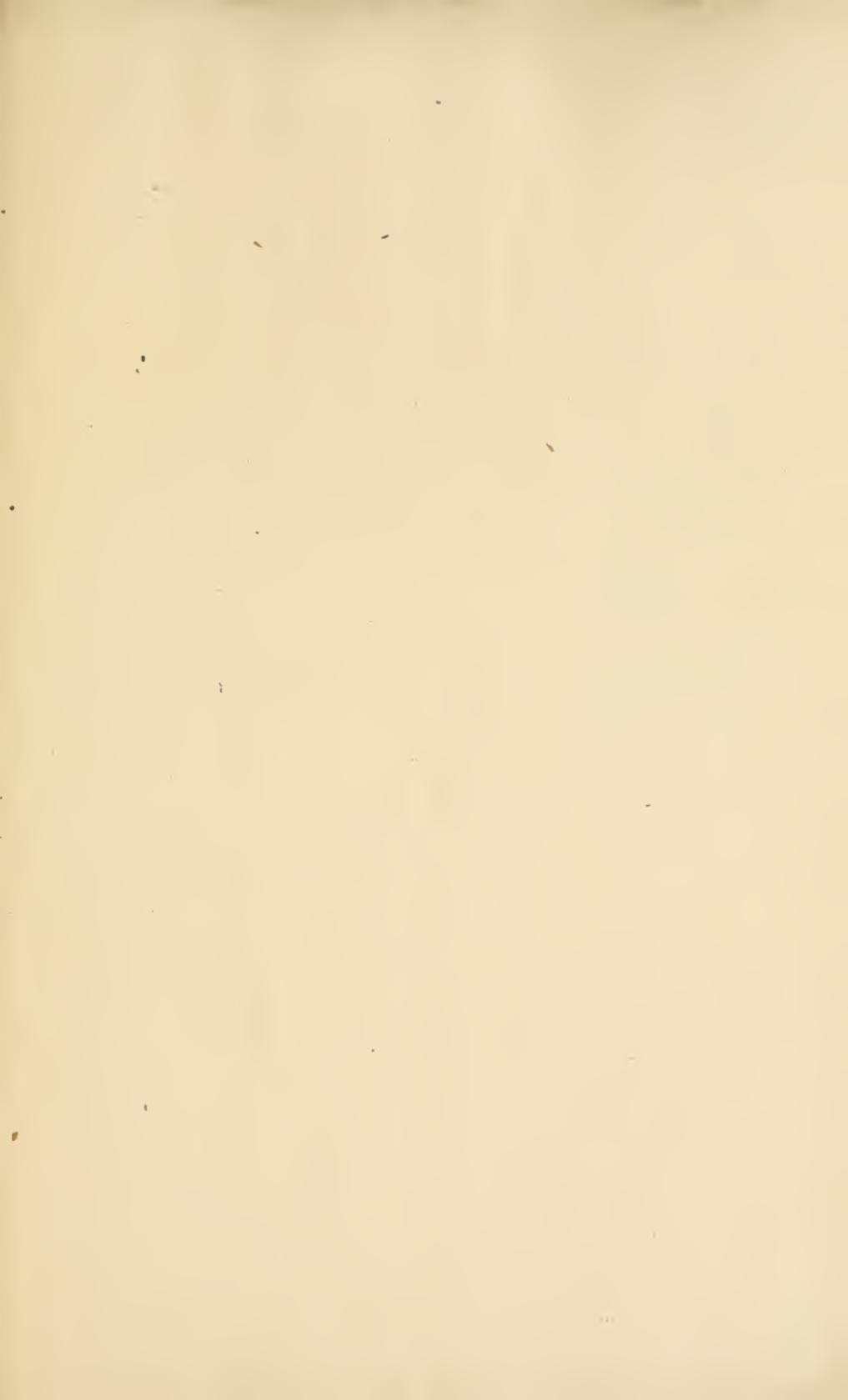
—for with the death of Lincoln the south lost its best, its noblest, its strongest friend.

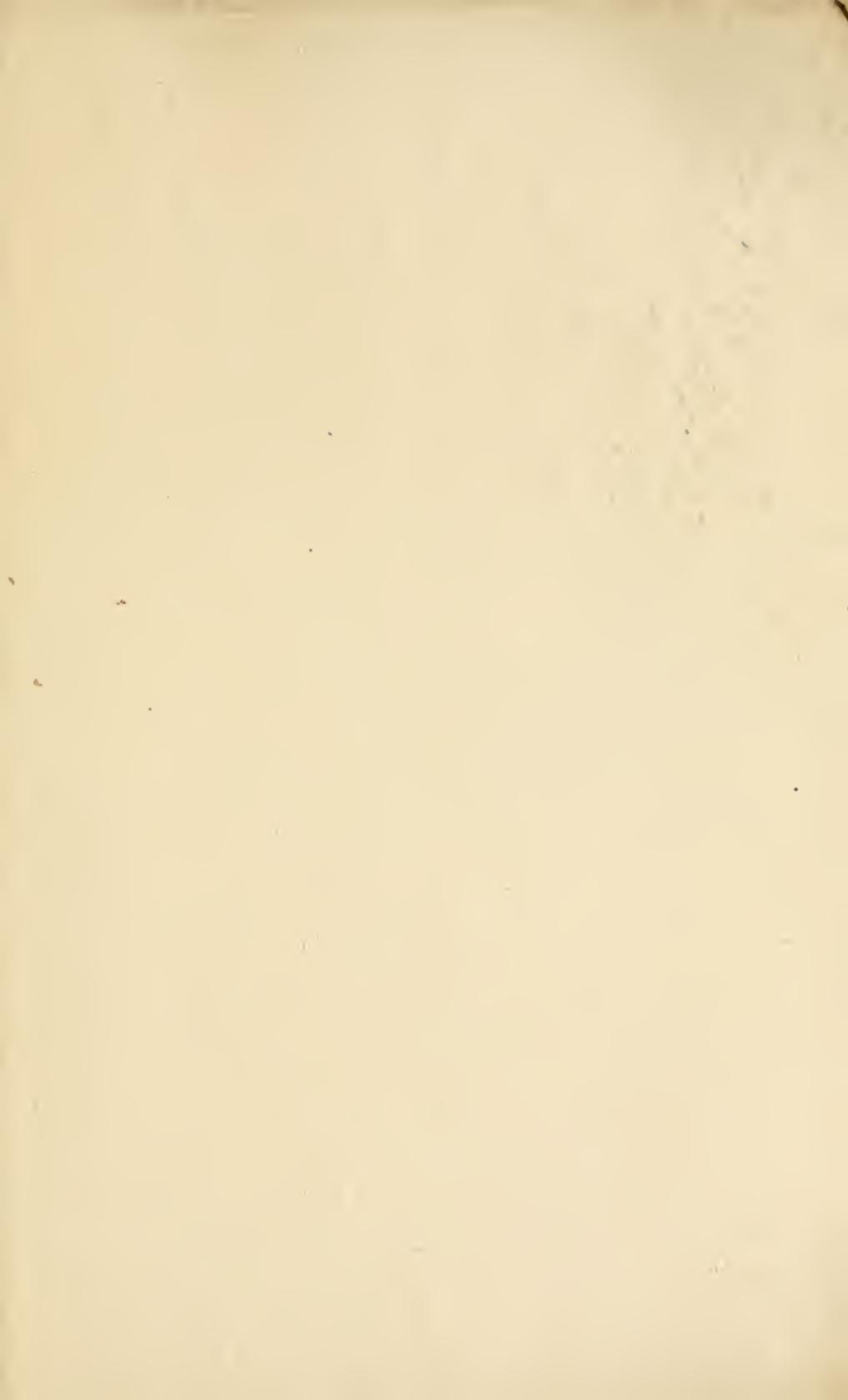
Lincoln in that April time, preserved to the completion of the task given him to do, was on a mount of Pisgah. He looked over into the promised land, and God took him.

On this centenary day we give him of the best of ourselves; and he leads us on. His name is writ in immortal life in the fadeless stars; and with every unfolding of the emblem of our union we hallow its stripes for him and because of him glory in its firmament. We are together, north and south, for Lincoln. We join hands in indissoluble brotherhood, lift moist eyes to heaven and repeat, with one accord: “We believe the hand of God placed him where he was.”

The heritage of children’s children, transmuted from generation to generation, is from the riches of his life. “By it he being dead yet speaketh.”

Great Example! Our Great Emancipator! The Savior of Our Country!





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